

commons/ <sup>1</sup> This was probably true, but their influence may also have had another and a better side to it. The households of the noblemen were the chief means by which foreign inventions, luxuries and manners were taught to the knights and country gentlemen of old England. We know how bucolic were those country squires of the seventeenth century who had no connection with the great world, and we can thereby distantly conjecture what the corresponding class in the fourteenth century resembled. Chivalry perhaps gave a superficial polish lacking to seventeenth-century society, but the rules and manners of chivalry were only taught and practised in the trains of the great lords. The domestic life of an independent country gentleman in his moated manor-house was more simple than elegant. When, however, a knight retired from the service of a lord, he imitated in his own establishment the habits he had learned in higher circles. Richard the Second's reign thus became the period of introducing luxury in dress and food ; it was the age of \* sleeves that slid upon the earth,\* of toe-points so long that the wearer could not kneel to say his prayers, and now, for the first time in our country, gentlemen's families retired from the great hall where they used to feed in patriarchal community with their household, to eat their more fashionable meals in private.<sup>2</sup> The tribute and plunder of France that were poured into England during the successful part of the hundred years' war, revolutionised the primitive economy of the feudal household, just as the tribute and plunder of the Mediterranean overturned among the Romans the austere simplicity of Camillus and Cato. Luxury, before it passes a certain point, is not an unmixed evil. Commerce grew, refinement spread, by the very means most abhorred by moralists. The merchants of the towns rejoiced to supply the lords' courts with every new fashion and requirement. By their very magnificence and outlay the nobles were helping the rise of the commercial democracy which was to take their place.

It may well be asked on what basis of law this system of retainers, with its multifarious effects on society, was per-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 243 and 207. \* Ric.  
*fadeless*, iii. 153 and 234; *P. PL*, B, x. 92-  
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